



Polycystic Ovary Syndrome Fact Sheet

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) is a health problem that affects one in 10 women of childbearing age. Women with PCOS have a hormonal imbalance and metabolism problems that may affect their overall health and appearance. PCOS is also a common and treatable cause of infertility. Polycystic ovary syndrome happens when a woman's ovaries or adrenal glands produce more male hormones than normal. One result is that cysts (fluid-filled sacs) develop on the ovaries. Women who are obese are more likely to have PCOS. Women with PCOS are at increased risk of developing diabetes and heart disease.

Signs & Symptoms include:

- Irregular menstrual cycle. Women with PCOS may miss periods or have fewer periods (fewer than eight in a year). Or, their periods may come every 21 days or more often. Some women with PCOS stop having menstrual periods.
- Too much hair on the face, chin, or parts of the body where men usually have hair.
- Acne on the face, chest, and upper back
- Thinning hair or hair loss on the scalp; male-pattern baldness
- Weight gain or difficulty losing weight
- Darkening of skin, particularly along neck creases, in the groin, and underneath breasts
- Skin tags, which are small excess flaps of skin in the armpits or neck area

To help diagnose PCOS and rule out other causes of your symptoms, your doctor may talk to you about your medical history and do a physical exam and different tests:

- **Physical exam.** Your doctor will measure your blood pressure, [body mass index \(BMI\)](#), and waist size. He or she will also look at your skin for extra hair on your face, chest or back, acne, or skin discoloration. Your doctor may look for any hair loss or signs of other health conditions (such as an enlarged thyroid gland).
- **Pelvic exam.** Your doctor may do a pelvic exam for signs of extra male hormones (for example, an enlarged clitoris) and check to see if your ovaries are enlarged or swollen.
- **Pelvic ultrasound (sonogram).** This test uses soundwaves to examine your ovaries for cysts and check the endometrium (lining of the uterus or womb).
- **Blood tests.** Blood tests check your androgen hormone levels, sometimes called "male hormones." Your doctor will also check for other hormones related to other common health problems that can be mistaken for PCOS, such as [thyroid disease](#). Your doctor may also test your cholesterol levels and test you for diabetes.

Sources: [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and [Office of Women's Health](#)

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